

Strategies for Active Reading

Active Readers:

- **Monitor Comprehension**
 - listen to their inner voice and follow the inner conversation,
 - notice when meaning breaks down and/or mind wanders
 - leave tracks of their thinking by jotting thoughts when reading
 - stop, think and react to information
 - talk about the reading before, during and after reading
 - respond to reading in writing
 - employ “fix up strategies” ---reread for clarification, read on to construct meaning, use context to break down an unfamiliar word, skip difficult parts and continue on to see if meaning becomes clear, check and recheck answers and thinking, examine evidence

- **Activate and Connect to Background Knowledge**
 - refer to prior personal experience
 - activate prior knowledge of the content, style, structure, features and genre
 - connect the new to the known- use what they know to understand new information
 - merge their thinking with new learning to build knowledge base
 - activate their schema to read strategically

- **Ask Questions**
 - wonder about the content, concepts, outcomes and genre
 - question the author
 - question the ideas and the information
 - read to discover answers and gain information
 - wonder about the text to understand big ideas
 - do further research and investigation to gain information

□ **Infer and Visualize Meaning**

- use context clues to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words
- draw conclusions from text evidence
- predict outcomes, events and characters' actions
- surface underlying themes
- answer questions that are not explicitly answered in the text
- create interpretations based on text evidence
- visualize as well as hear, taste, smell and feel the words and ideas

□ **Determine Importance**

- sift important ideas from interesting but less important details
- target key information and code the text to hold thinking
- distinguish between what the reader thinks is important and what the author most wants the reader to take away
- construct main ideas from supporting details
- choose what to remember

□ **Synthesize and Summarize**

- take stock of meaning while reading
- add to knowledge base
- paraphrase information
- move from facts to ideas
- use the parts to see the whole--read for the gist
- rethink misconceptions and tie opinions to the text
- revise thinking during and after reading
- merge what is known with new information to form a new idea, perspective, or insight
- generate knowledge

The Components of Active Literacy

Reading, Writing, Drawing, Talking, Listening,

Viewing, Doing and Investigating:

Engage in the world of issues and ideas, enhance understanding, expand thinking, develop insight, acquire and actively use knowledge.

- ▶ **Talking and listening to each other**

Having a conversation, discussing, agreeing, disagreeing, debating.

- ▶ **Reading and viewing to construct meaning**

Noticing and thinking about the inner conversation, asking questions, making connections, inferring, synthesizing information.

- ▶ **Responding to reading by talking, listening, writing and drawing**

Having a conversation about the text, connecting to experience, wondering, thinking inferentially, thinking about and beyond the text, writing and drawing to think and remember, noticing important information, connecting, asking questions, debating the author.

- ▶ **Writing and drawing to discover and explore thinking**

Learning new information, wondering, connecting, inferring.

- ▶ **Investigating and doing further research**

Asking and answering questions, finding out information, learning more, synthesizing, building and using knowledge, developing insight.

- ▶ **Designing, doing and making**

Designing and planning, putting stuff together, building things.

Explicit Instruction in Reading Comprehension

The Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) (Pearson and Gallagher 1983)

- ▶ **Teacher Modeling**
 - Teacher explains strategy
 - Teacher models strategy
 - Teacher think aloud when reading to show thinking and strategy use
- ▶ **Guided Practice**
 - After explicit modeling, teacher gradually gives students more responsibility for task engagement and completion.
 - Teacher and students practice the strategy together in shared reading contexts, reasoning through the text and co-constructing meaning through discussion and text lifting.
 - Teacher and students work together in whole group, small groups and conferences.
 - Students hear from each other about one another's thinking process.
- ▶ **Collaborative Practice**
 - Students work in small groups and pairs and reason through text together.
 - Students hear from each other about one another's thinking process.
 - Teacher moves about the room touching base with collaborative groups.
- ▶ **Independent Practice**
 - After working with teacher and other students, student tries practicing the strategy on own.
 - Student receives regular feedback from teacher and other students.
- ▶ **Application of the Strategy**
 - The student uses the strategy in authentic reading situations.
 - The student uses the strategy in a variety of different genres, settings, contexts, and disciplines. (Harvey and Goudvis 2005)

Nonfiction Reading Comprehension

Tips for better understanding

▶ Activate background knowledge

Very important in nonfiction reading, particularly if the reader has limited knowledge about the content area.

▶ Make connections between the known and the new

Nonfiction reader can be encouraged to think carefully about content they already know when they meet new information so they can anchor it to past knowledge to enhance understanding.

▶ Ask questions

Nonfiction readers are full of questions, particularly when they are reading about less familiar content. They can be encouraged to write their questions down, think about them and search for answers.

▶ Visualize

Nonfiction is chock full of features (maps, charts, graphs, photographs, illustrations) that help us get a picture of the concept. Use all of them to better understand. Nonfiction readers can often get a better picture of something if the writer compares its size or dimensions to a familiar object. Notice and use these comparisons to better understand a concept.

▶ Use the features of nonfiction to support understanding and remember important information

Information in nonfiction comes from the features as well as the text. The bold print, italics, framed text, photographs, maps, diagrams, graphs, charts, etc. support the reader to better understand.

▶ Read for the gist, stopping and thinking as you go

Nonfiction reading is more like a slide show or a newscast than a movie in your mind. Nonfiction readers need to stop frequently to think about the information they have read. They need to synthesize as they go.

▶ Read with a pen in hand

When reading nonfiction, we meet large amounts of unfamiliar information. We are far more likely to remember information if we jot something down, highlighting or coding as we go. We also meet compelling information and then stop and think about it, often asking a question or making a connection.

▶ **Pay attention to your inner conversation when meeting new information**

Nonfiction reading is reading to learn. Nonfiction readers must be aware of when they learn new information. They can listen to their inner voice and notice what they hear when they meet new information, i.e., "I never knew that before" and then mark it in writing to help remember it later.

▶ **Separate what is new and interesting from what is truly important**

In well written nonfiction text, important information is often embedded in rich detail. Nonfiction reader run the risk of being swept away from meaning by the interesting but less important tidbits that run through the genre.

▶ **Skim and scan to get bits of information quickly**

Nonfiction readers skim and scan for quick information, noting key words and ideas. But skimming and scanning by definition reduces comprehension.

▶ **Notice the paragraph structure**

Frequently in nonfiction, the first and last sentence of a paragraph or the first and last paragraph of a section hold important information.

▶ **Notice the writing form**

The most common form of nonfiction writing includes a lead that hooks the reader and then a paragraph or so of straight information coupled with another more interesting paragraph that reengages the reader. Nonfiction readers must be made aware of this or they will skip right through the content piece to read the more interesting stuff.

▶ **Notice the text structure**

Nonfiction is written in a variety of text structures including compare and contrast, cause and effect, question and answer, problem and solution, descriptive, and sequential. Point out these different expository structures and support students to recognize them as they read.

▶ **Merge your thinking with the information and recognize the importance of your own thoughts**

Nonfiction is not merely about reading the writer's information. Nonfiction reading is about much more than remembering isolated facts. To learn and remember what we read in nonfiction text, we must merge our thinking with the ideas and information to understand it and come up with some thoughts of our own.

Overviewing & Annotating

Readers need to make their reading “thinking intensive”. When students read nonfiction, they need to overview the text by skimming and scanning the text as follows:

- Activating prior knowledge
- Noting characteristics of text length and structure
- Noting important headings and subheadings
- Determining what to read and in what order
- Determining what to pay careful attention to
- Determining what to ignore
- Deciding to quit because the text contains no relevant information
- Deciding if the text is worth careful reading or skimming (Dole 1996)



Annotating Guidelines

To effectively annotate text, readers need to read the information, think about it and make conscious decisions about what they need to focus on in order to learn and remember. It is not helpful to highlight or underline without jotting down thinking in the margins or on a post-it. If readers want to learn and remember what they read, they need to merge their thinking with the text to understand it, annotating their thoughts in the margins as they go. They need to sort important information from rich, less important details. They need to pick out the big ideas and let go of ancillary information.

- Mark up the text with words, ideas or connections that come up while reading
- Highlight or underline only necessary words and phrases, not entire sentences.
- When highlighting or underlining text information, jot notes in the margin or on a Post-it to record thinking and to remember the purpose for having highlighted or underlined in the first place.
- Look carefully at the first and last line of each paragraph. Important information is often contained there.
- Don't get thrown off by interesting details. Although fascinating, they often obscure important information.
- Note signal words. They are almost always followed by important information.
- Pay attention to the vast array of nonfiction features that signal importance.
- Pay attention to surprising information. It may signal new learning.

Annotate Text: *Leave Tracks of Thinking*



See this lesson in action on pages 149, 179, 183, 209.

TIP: When working with library books or textbooks that cannot be marked up, kids use Post-its instead of writing in the margins. Post-its are especially handy for our earliest readers, since they can also draw their thoughts. The 3x5 size works very well for the youngest kids. We teach older students to use the whole range of text-marking tools—Post-its, codes, underlining, and annotation—so they can really “attack” the surface of texts and dig out meaning.

WHEN and WHY: As kids do research and read for information, they need to leave tracks of their thinking so they can learn, understand, and remember what they read.

INITIATE: Annotation is a powerful reading tool. Explain that we need to make our reading “thinking intensive” and interact with the text while we read by jotting our thinking. Share an analogy. Talk about the tracks animals leave in the snow after a storm. When we wake up in the morning after a snowfall, we can tell who has been there from the fresh tracks, even though the animal is long gone. Explain that we need to see the kids’ thinking even if they are no longer reading. Readers need to leave tracks in the margins, just as animals do in the snow or on the beach.

TEACH/MODEL: Explain that *annotating* means writing down your ideas as you read. Tell them, “Nothing matters more than your thinking when you read.” Let kids know that instead of highlighting, you are going to jot your thoughts because when readers do that, they remember why they wrote something and are better able to understand. Mention that tracks like these give readers a place to hold their thinking. At the overhead projector, think aloud through a piece of text and jot connections, questions, important information, and inferences in the margins. Share some text codes—a ★ for an important information, a ? for a question, and so forth. Show how you notice when you find an answer or how you might need to research further if your question is not answered.

GUIDED PRACTICE: Engage kids in the process by handing out a copy of the same article you have been modeling with. Read a paragraph, then stop and give students time to jot their thoughts and codes in the margins. Encourage them to turn and talk to a partner and discuss their thinking tracks. Create an anchor chart of various text codes that you come up with together.

TEXT CODES

- ✓ for something known
- L for new learning
- ? or Q for a question
- ?? for confusion
- ★ for important information
- ! for exciting or surprising information
- R for a connection (Reminds me...)

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE: Encourage kids to leave tracks of their thinking as they continue to read and respond to articles in their inquiry circles.



Signal Words and Phrases

Signal words cue readers to pay attention to what’s coming up. They signal a change in thinking, a contrast or a similar relationship between ideas, a conclusion etc. As kids read informational text, they will encounter a wide variety of signal words and phrases. Co-Construct an anchor chart of signal words for display in the classroom. And have kids be on the lookout for signal words in their own reading and have them note the purpose. Paying attention to signal words and phrases is a necessary skill for strategic readers as they read nonfiction in their daily lives and when the encounter nonfiction on the test!

Signal Word	Purpose
Surprisingly	Be prepared to expect the unexpected
Importantly	Signals importance! Stop and pay attention
But	Signals a change to come
However	Prepare to change your thinking
Likewise	Cues a similarity
Consequently,	Signals a result/cause and effect
Before, After, Next, Finally, Then, Now	All show sequence

Signal Phrase	Purpose
In conclusion	Wraps up and synthesizes the information
In Sum	Wraps up and synthesizes
There are several factors	Signals an answer to a big question or idea
There are several reasons	Same as above
There are several purposes	Same as above
As opposed to	Signals a contrast
On the other hand	Signals a change to come
In addition to	Adds another factor
Because of	Cause and effect

Always be on the
lookout for the
presence of wonder.

E.B. White

Conditions for Curiosity:

- View learning and life as an experiment where we grow, learn & innovate by working on something, making mistakes and trying again (& again...)
- Celebrate the questioning and the learning rather than the knowing.
- Build in time every day for kids to experiment, explore and investigate.
- Model your own curiosity every day and show that you care about finding answers.

(Harvey 16)